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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1035
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFIUU/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RUEABND/DRUG ENFORCEMENT ADMIN HQ WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/DIRJIATF SOUTH PRIORITY

UNCLAS SAN JOSE 000591

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR WHA/CEN, WHA/PPC, INL/LP AND PM, SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR
FPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MASS](#) [PINR](#) [OVIP](#) [CS](#)

SUBJECT: COSTA RICA: MINISTER RODRIGO ARIAS VISITS SOUTHCOM

REF: A. SAN JOSE 587

[1](#)B. SAN JOSE 525

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On July 8, Rodrigo Arias, Minister of the Presidency and brother of President Oscar Arias, visited SOUTHCOM, focusing on high-level strategic security cooperation. Minister Arias told us the GOCR was grateful for the USG's (and in particular, SOUTHCOM's) strong bilateral security relationship with Costa Rica as well as the last two years of increased humanitarian assistance (Ref B). Arias briefed new SOUTHCOM Commanding General Douglas Fraser on the GOCR's renewed focus on long-delayed security reforms and requested even more cooperation and assistance from SOUTHCOM (and USG in general for programs such as Merida). Finally, Arias discussed the current Honduran political crisis (Ref A). This visit represented the highest level visit from the Arias Administration since it took office in 2006 and was a long-planned reciprocal visit to Admiral Stavridis' December 2008 visit to Costa Rica.

[1](#)2. (SBU) On July 8, Minister Arias, who is the Prime Minister equivalent and oversees Costa Rica's intelligence service (DIS) as well as its ONDCP equivalent (ICD), met with new SOUTHCOM Commander General Fraser and provided him a focused brief on the Arias Administration's priorities. Arias was accompanied by Luis Diego Escalante, Costa Rican Ambassador to the United States and Lorena Sanchez, Costa Rican Consul General in Miami. Arias explained that since "the bruising CAFTA debate was now over," his brother's administration had shifted its full attention to long-overdue security reforms. Arias said that recently completed reforms included the passage of a victims and witness protection law as well as an organized crime bill (expected to be signed into law soon). The organized crime law will include important provisions on the establishment of a national communications interception (wiretap) center, critical to criminal prosecutions.

[1](#)3. (SBU) After receiving the JIATF-S counternarcotics briefing, Arias agreed and emphasized that Costa Rica's geographical location was a critical drug transshipment point on the Isthmus. Arias underscored that Costa Rica had become far more than just a drug transit country, it was now a major "warehouse" for illegal drugs in storage (mainly cocaine), while awaiting further shipment north.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Minister Arias thanked SOUTHCOM (and the USG in general) for its assistance over the past few years in both counternarcotics and humanitarian programs. When asked if Costa Rica would accept further and perhaps even more assistance in the future, Arias resoundingly replied that Costa Rica would welcome enhanced assistance and cooperation. He said that Costa Rica needed all the help it could get,

especially considering the increasingly high rate of both petty and violent crime in the country. Arias specifically requested more assistance in counter drug operations and more (and sustained) Merida Initiative assistance.

¶5. (SBU) Finally, Arias discussed the Honduran political crisis (see Ref A for full read-out).

COMMENT

¶6. (SBU) This long-awaited visit by Minister Arias to SOUTHCOM paid off and validated the increased level of military support that DoD, as implemented mainly by SOUTHCOM, has provided to Costa Rica over the past two years. Arias clearly appreciated the support that Costa Rica had received and looked forward to even more USG assistance. Ambassador Escalante, meanwhile, clearly views his role in Washington as one of obtaining/advocating for further security assistance from, and cooperation with, the U.S.

¶7. (U) Post thanks SOUTHCOM and JIATF-South for putting this visit together, which we see as an important milestone in the USG-GOCR relationship.
BRENNAN